

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 4, 2003

Dear Colleague:

Please join us in promoting the transportation needs of senior citizens within the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

We hope that you will join us in signing the letter below. If you would like to cosign the letter, please contact Molly McCarthy with Senator Wyden (4-5244) or Kathryn Webb with Senator Smith (4-3753) by November 19, 2003.

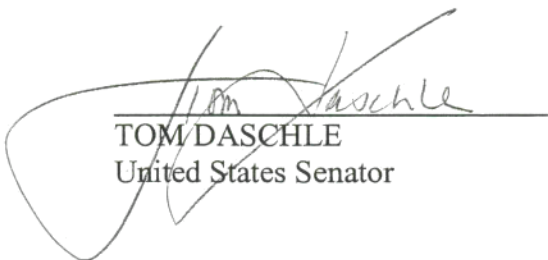
Sincerely,



RON WYDEN
United States Senator



GORDON SMITH
United States Senator



TOM DASCHLE
United States Senator



CHARLES GRASSLEY
United States Senator

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2003

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing
and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Paul Sarbanes
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing
and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Sarbanes:

As the Committee draws closer to determining its funding and policy priorities in the new authorization bill for federal surface transportation projects, we would like to take this opportunity to call your attention to the pressing transportation needs of our nation's senior citizens.

There is a tremendous increase in the need for transportation services for senior citizens. While older adults largely utilize private cars for transportation, the majority will lose the physical and/or financial capacity to drive or maintain a car as they age. In 2000, persons 65 years and older numbered 35 million, and it is projected that this population will more than double to 70 million, or 20 percent of the total population, as the baby boom generation reaches age 65 from 2010 to 2030. The availability of transportation becomes even more of an issue as individuals age into their 70s and 80s. Persons 85 and over are the fastest-growing segment of the American population, increasing at a rate four times faster than the overall population. Most of these individuals rely on family, friends or public and private transportation to access services and participate in social and recreational events in their communities.

Finding necessary transportation is difficult for most elderly, and particularly for those who live in either suburban or rural communities where destinations are too far to walk, public transit is non-existent or poor, and private transportation, if available, is limited and often prohibitively expensive. Many older adults are reluctant to rely on friends and family even for their most essential transportation needs -- access to health and social services -- and the result is often increasing isolation and deterioration in health and quality of life. As a result, transportation is not only a critical part of the service delivery system but is also essential to older adults maintaining their independence.

The reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) provides an excellent opportunity for Congress to improve the availability and accessibility of transportation services for our senior citizens. We support the following steps to ensure that seniors have more adequate transportation options:

- **Adequately fund federal transportation projects dedicated to serve senior citizens.** We support significantly increased funding levels for the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5310 Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Program. Currently the Section 5310

formula grant program is funded at \$90 million for FY 2003; we propose a significant increase in funding for this program's authorization levels. This would help offset the estimated \$1 billion/year in unmet transportation needs that exist for seniors.

- **Provide states with more flexibility in the use of Section 5310 funds.** Currently, the Section 5310 funds are limited to capital expenditures; we propose changing the permissible use of these funds to include assistance with operating costs. This change would greatly assist providers who are now struggling to maintain and ensure handicap accessible and senior-friendly vans and buses. We also propose changing matching requirements of the Section 5310, to allow non-FTA matching funds to come from any source, including other federal programs. These changes would be consistent with FTA's Section 5311 Rural Transportation Program.
- **Expand the Section 5310 program to include demonstration project funding within the FTA for best practices associated with senior transportation projects.** At the local level, many innovative and collaborative transportation projects are being established to help meet the needs of senior citizens. However, with the growing demands for services, we feel that expanding demonstration project funding to help foster new and innovative solutions with eligibility open to all public and private community-based agencies is sorely needed.
- **Provide effective means to address the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities in transportation planning and decision-making.** As part of coordinated regional and statewide transportation planning, states and metropolitan planning organizations must thoroughly evaluate the impact of transportation systems on seniors and people with disabilities. Stakeholders in these populations must be given ample opportunity to comment during the development of transportation improvement programs. Seniors and persons with disabilities should be represented on transportation planning commissions and MPO boards.

We look forward to working with you closely to ensure that the growing transportation needs of senior citizens are not overlooked, and that they receive their fair share of transportation resources. We thank you for your interest in this critical issue.

Sincerely,